



# WHAT IS POLICING?

with appendix

Tactical Terrain Analysis: a How-To Guide

excerpts from  
The Master's Tools:  
Warfare & Insurgent Possibility

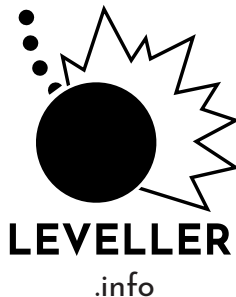


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# POLICING AS PARADOX

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*Politics is generally seen as the set of procedures whereby the aggregation and consent of collectivities is achieved, the organization of powers, the distribution of places and roles, and the systems for legitimizing this distribution. I propose to give this system of distribution and legitimation another name. I propose to call it the police.*

—Jacques Ranciere, *Dis-agreement*

**INSURGENCY**, an intentional engagement in social war, is always an immediate and material dynamic. It is a series of actions with effects in immediate moments in time and space, within a particular convergence of the dynamics of history, but we would never be able to grasp this by listening to our activist friends and the ways that resistance is spoken about in those circles. Listening to movement rhetoric, we are transported to a world where metaproblems exist, where political passions and concepts of true speech somehow mean something in themselves, where the interests of the movement mean more than taking materially effective action. A feedback loop builds: they talk to one another about the reasons they resist, and the conceptual frameworks that justify certain actions, but never about the actual dynamics of resistance, or the terrain in which one fights. In this discourse two questions are fused together: one involving the actual dynamics of action and history and the other how we conceptually make sense of this in more or less consistent, but still arbitrary, ways. Rather than this odd sort of meta-analysis, which prevents us from engaging in a way to understand and impact the operation of the state, we must

start to ask questions of operation, the inscription of concepts, or policies (which are just conceptual), into time and space (rather than concepts like ethics and political desire). It requires an approach to action that starts from a sober reading of the dynamics of operation, the moments in which operation occurs, and the structuring of space. To engage with the dynamics of resistance, of fighting and thus of warfare, means to separate these questions of events and the ways that we make sense of events in a conceptual sense, to analyze action on the level of immediacy, and to take action based on this concept of the immediate. In this analysis there is no purpose in complaining about corporate immorality; it is only necessary to understand the operation of land enclosure, private property, the operations of economics and imposed scarcity—in short, the administrative and material possibility of capitalism itself, as a conceptual content that is then operated by the state, through policing. This means fundamentally shifting the way we understand what we fight against, the imposition of certain unities and concepts of unity into everyday life through a material operation. Or, in other words, the state.

The state always already only exists as a concept in a unitary sense, and thus as an impossibility. In the concept of the state there is an attempt to construct a constancy of particular moments, a permanence of impermanence. This is not where the problem arises. On this level the state is nothing but one of innumerable manifestations of the impossibility of philosophy, the attempt to speak of particular phenomena, and the moments these occur through transcendental and qualitative concepts. The paradox is this: the state occurs, yet the conceptual structure of the state prevents anything from occurring. The conceptual framework defines time and space as a sameness, as inert space in which all objects and actions are isolated and infused with this conceptual content; people are citizens or not, actions are illegal or not. The action becomes removed from itself, the possibilities of existence become removed from themselves, but this means nothing if it only exists in the realm of particular concepts that are constructed by particular people. The question of the state is not a question of the concept of the state, it is nothing but another manifestation of the impossibility of speaking truth, and just as arbitrary as any other conceptual apparatus. The question must shift; it must be a question, not of

the concept,<sup>1</sup> but of the attempt to take a particular concept—thought in a particular way by a particular person in a particular moment—and project this concept as a universal definition of existence and the possibilities of existence totally and materially. For these concepts to manifest entails a paradox. Particular actions have to be taken in particular moments, yet with the intention of depriving moments of this particularity and defining them through the framework of a material conceptual totality; particular things must occur, even though these things are impossible within the conceptual totality of the state. This projection must be material, even though the conceptual framework eschews all materiality; it must attempt to manifest this totality, even though this operation only occurs through particular actions, each of which have effects, and, therefore, fundamentally alter the dynamics of time and space. We call this attempt—to manifest totality through the dynamics of the particular—policing.

The state must occur, otherwise we are dealing with nothing but another conceptual construct, but at this point the state becomes something partial, historical, and based in the dynamics of conflict and moment. As such, the state remains an impossibility: the attempt to construct unity even though things are occurring—all moments are defined, but only to the degree that policing functions in time and space, and only to the degree that this operation is effective. For example, it is always possible to move in to an abandoned building, or take something off of a store's shelf. These actions only become “resistance” in relation to policing. If the state were to function as a totality nothing could occur, everything would be defined, and if things did occur they would have to occur without cause, and arise randomly.

Schopenhauer explains this in his description of a nightmare in which the possibility of truth means that all existence ceases, but concepts continue to exist. For something to be true nothing could ever change, all moments would have to be irrelevant, and could not have any effects: events would just arise with no possible historical dynamics, if they could arise at all.

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1 To be able to make the determination of an incorrect concept is to also argue that one knows the correct concept, and thus truth.

But, if the concept of the state is separated from this concept of totality, of the definition of existence in a universal way, then the state manifests as something that occurs, an arbitrary deployment of organized force into moments—or warfare. To put this another way, if the state actually possessed some existential truth then action would be irrelevant, this truth would just structure all actions; but, to the degree that the state operates, exists as logistics, then action is being taken, and that action cannot possibly cover the totality of time and space—there will always be gaps in coverage, crises of logistics, and so on. This begins to construct the fundamental paradox of the state, as recognized in Foucault:<sup>2</sup> the state always operates as a mobilization of force and conflict in time and space in the attempt to impose peace, or the end of all possible action. We see this in Mussolini<sup>3</sup> when he discusses the state as both given and practically tactile in a historical sense; implying a determinism that is indeterministic. He calls this the spiritual immanence of the state, that things somehow occur, but they are premised by the state as a material given.

Schmitt argues as much in *The Crisis of Parliamentary Democracy*,<sup>4</sup> where he draws a fundamental division between the universalized rationalism of the parliamentary structure and the irrationalism of the operations of the state. Parliamentary, or conceptual, discourse exists within a space that assumes the necessity of the conversation, and the ability to come to some agreement through it. But this is lacking and paradoxical on two different levels. Firstly, for this concept of the unitary state to function we have to assume that, somehow, there can be conflict, necessary for debate, within some ahistorical singularity, the eternal necessity of the conversation, making the assumption of the conversation the condition of possibility for all action. Secondly, this assumes that, within the conversation itself, the solutions generated are somehow universalized materially without

2 Foucault, 2003; *Society Must Be Defended*

3 Mussolini, 1936; Mussolini discusses the state as an active totality. All existence is framed through the state and one's value is in their role in maintaining a unity that is materially impossible. Hence the structure of the fasci, even before the March on Rome, the attempt to construct unity through force, through the elimination of all political contingency.

4 Schmitt, 1988



any action. This leads to a basic separation between this concept of the (political, conceptual) conversation and the material attempts to operate this conceptual content in materially universal ways through particular actions. As such, what Schmitt terms “the state” is a separate, immediate, material, relationship of force, attempting to operate the content generated by these conversations. This immediacy moves the state outside of the framework of the total description, and moves its manifestation into the immediate and material—a space which cannot be theorized in any sort of direct way, outside of attempts to make sense of it.

This means, however, that the state cannot be seen as a unitary entity, or a static condition: its attempt at totality is always unfulfilled. The attempt to construct the unity of time and space is disrupted by the emergence of events and actions, including the very functioning of the state, which has effects, constructs other possibilities and resistances through these effects, and so on. We cannot see the state as a unitary entity that makes things occur or imposes restrictions; rather these restrictions, these definitions of existence, cannot function outside of the particular actions taken, in the form of policing, which in themselves are always partial and generate effects and conflict in themselves by their very occurrence. In this partiality, in this operation, in this constant flux of history and its convergence into moments, the state (to the degree that it cannot impose total peace through the cosmic catastrophe, the end of all action) must always exist as nothing but the attempt to construct an impossible unity of time and space, while deploying force into time and space. It can be nothing but the more-or-less frantic attempt to impossibly operate transcendental concepts in particular moments, in all moments, in all spaces simultaneously. If this cannot actually function without causing a cosmic catastrophe in which all existence ceases to be relevant or ends all together, if it cannot freeze all dynamics and history, if actions continue to have effects, then this paradox becomes operational. So, we cannot think of the state as unifying its concept and its operation. The concept asserts a unity of time and space that the operation itself disrupts and makes impossible. The state only exists through this mobilization of force, and attempts to construct unity in each and every moment, as a form attempting to construct the operation of some conceptual content in all moments.

Not only is this partiality of operation, the ability to maintain operations in only some times and some spaces, but this also constructs the state as a fundamentally different attempt from the construction of meaning that motivates and directs this operation. The state exists as an immediacy, rather than a unity, and can only be effectively confronted on this level. The constant war waged on our streets every day is potentially motivated by these concepts of the state, but the concepts are irrelevant. Rather, the question of the state, and of confrontation with the logistics of the state, is not a conceptual question. It is not enough to understand the state—there is no singular entity to understand—nor to grasp the operations of the police in a general sense—this is only the attempt to make sense of phenomena. Engagement, insurgency itself, is a material dynamic, completely outside of the realm of nice, neat, rationality. On this level, it is not a question of whether the state is right, or a desirable political concept, the only aspect we must focus on is this: that the unity of time and space is impossible to understand, and that the attempt to operate such a theoretical unity entails an impossibility that leads to a constant mobilization of force in everyday life.

Yet, as clear as it is that the state operates somewhere, at some time, this is often obscured in the narratives of resistance to the state. These narratives tend to attempt an inductive movement, to posit qualitative content to the particular and material. This accomplishes nothing but the reduction of policing to a singular conceptual object (much the way that pacifists do with all conflict) and fail to develop a framework of analysis for the actual dynamics that occur, preventing a more or less effective thought of resistance and disruption from emerging. In too much of the writings about police and policing, writers fall back into distracting and more-or-less irrelevant moralistic arguments about brutality and force. All too often, texts on the police are attempts to construct some unitary narrative of policing as institutional, as the manifestation of some static institution that exists independent of history itself. We see this play out in all discussions of the police racism. It is not that the police are not racist, obviously. But stating it in this form, and limiting analysis to this form, implies assumptions that limit the possibility of analysis on an operational level. For this to be true we have to assume the unity of the institution

of The Police, as an entity that is somehow separate from the particularities of its operation, of the internal conflicts within this logistical structure, and as separate from changes in historical dynamics that modify the manifestations of policing in time and space. On this level, we ignore the most important aspect of policing: it occurs somewhere, at some time, and is only existent on this plane of immediacy.

We see similar analyses play themselves out in ethical arguments about policing, whether policing is “right” or “wrong.” Just as in this sociological-historical reading, we must first generate a universal framework of qualitative analysis, then impart this into the analysis of a single object. Whenever someone argues that the police are racist or brutal, individual actions (taken in particular times and spaces) become isolated from their immediate dynamics as a separate manifestation of a specific qualitative characterization, and the action and the characterization are fused into one, single, universal statement. This is not a problem on the qualitative level of description; I think most of us would agree that police tend to be racist and brutal. Rather, this analysis is limited to the ways that we understand the concept that we call police in an ethical or politically conceptual way. As an immediate dynamic, policing operates with variance, in particular ways, in particular times and spaces. In the attempt to impart universal ethical, emotional, or conceptually political content into these particular manifestations we obscure the immediacy of this deployment of force, the ways it is organized materially, and the gaps and crises in that operation.

This manifestation in a particular time and space is a material question. Removing the discourse of policing from the discussion of its immediate and material manifestations, its immediacy and the implications of this, moves an irrational relationship of force (mobilized in material moments) outside of its immediacy (attempting to relate to it as rationally coherent). This sort of removal of immediate dynamics from themselves is a common framework of tactical discussions, specifically ones centered around the question of violence (which plague so-called radical scenes). In this discussion, the action and its dynamics are removed from their immediacy, frozen in time as some specific moment to be analyzed, and

then analyzed in reference to some arbitrary classification of ethics, such as the imparting of concepts of universal effectiveness of definitions of violence/ non-violence to materially specific and immediate actions. This removal makes it impossible to speak of the dynamics of the action itself, forcing us to make sense of the action only in reference to universalized conceptual totalities, again assuming some over-riding rationality. By conflating the transcendental concept of policing as a conceptual object, and the material operations of police logistics, we end up reducing policing to a static concept in which no action occurs and we ignore the tactical manifestation of policing as a logistical and totalizing organization of cohesive force.

As a phenomenon, or series of phenomena grouped together under a single term, policing must occur in some time and in some place, otherwise we are speaking of phantasms. But for this to be the case, policing cannot be reduced to an inert conceptual object: incapable of acting, being, moving, and so on. We can never group together the concept and the phenomena of policing into a single entity. Rather, we have to either speak of the conceptual object of policing, at which point we cease to analyze the phenomena of policing, or we have to form a different sort of analysis, to understand policing as a phenomena particular to a time and space, one that also shifts in form. This entails a fundamental change, away from the ethical and conceptually political, and into a grounding in tactical immediacy and logistical dynamics. We can see this in the rebellions of the “Arab Awakening.” In the initial phases discourse may be focused on utopian dreams. But when struggle becomes immediate, when it breaks out onto the streets, discourse grounds itself in tactical expediency. However, focusing on tactics presents its own theoretical difficulties. As Clausewitz<sup>5</sup> and Naveh<sup>6</sup> point out, tactical thought is impossible; one cannot think a particular moment in all ways without consequently positing that there is truth and that one could know it, making the effects of material actions irrelevant within some form of determinism. But strategic thought, or thought grounded in meta-contexts, is irrelevant; it is merely

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5 Clausewitz, 1968

6 Naveh, 1997

the way that we think about particular actions and dynamics, the immediate and material. As such, Naveh points to a place between strategic and tactical thought: operational theory. Operational theory is the attempt to think tactics, while recognizing its impossibility: if tactics are immediate and material dynamics, then there are no tactics to speak of, in a general sense. This will be the framework that we start from: the focus on the immediate and material, and on ways to make sense of this—but outside of the question of whether these frameworks are true, in the transcendental sense, or not. The attempt here, therefore, is not to develop some total understanding of policing, but to develop a framework to evaluate the materiality of police operations and logistics, as they deploy in time and space (which will only be judged as to whether it is instrumentally effective or not).

In this, we can begin to reconstruct our understandings of resistance, fighting, insurgency, and warfare. There should be no question about this: insurgency and insurgent movements entail warfare. They exist as spaces, conceptual categorizations marking the space between friends and enemies, and in this they are the basis of politics.<sup>7</sup> This designation is an acknowledgement of both agonism and the immediacy of conflict. The acknowledgement of agonism is the understanding that conflict structures history, that everything that occurs does so in the midst of innumerable other dynamics that have effects on the trajectory of action, making outcomes impossible to determine, and infusing all operational theory with a foundation of calculated probability, impermanence, and uncertainty. Acknowledging immediacy separates the two formerly posed questions, the immediate dynamics of a moment and the conceptual meta-analysis of that moment, and focuses on immediacy as a point of departure. For too long we have been fooling ourselves, convinced that our politics, in the sense of theory, somehow lead to something called praxis, an impossible fusion of theory and action. Rather, we have to approach theory and analysis from a fundamentally different direction: as something that occurs and thus has effects—as something that is always either more or less effective.<sup>8</sup>

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7 Schmitt, 1996: *The Concept of the Political*

8 Sorel, 2004

# POLICING AS PROJECTION & CAPACITY

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*To create architecture is to put in order.*

*Put what in order? Function and objects.*

—Le Corbusier

**THE POLICE** are an occupying force, but of an odd sort. When occupation is thought of it is usually as a blanket, total, form, one infecting all aspects of everyday life. But this is always an impossible totality. The concepts of the occupation are total, a space is occupied and defined by these operations, but occupation is never a total phenomena, it never actually enters into the possibility of actions to frame and determine actions. If it did, then resistance would be impossible. Rather, policing functions as a logistics of action, held together conceptually through logistical supply lines, uniforms, command structures, communications, and so on. This logistics enters into everyday life in a mythology of the unity of time and space as defined by the occupation, but this unity never actually functions, possibility is never actually defined. Policing is a deployment of force in a vain attempt to define actions, and in the process it must be positioned. It is not some ethereal force that exercises control over actions (although police violence definitely acts as a deterrent). All

they can do is inject more or less organized action, which carries more or fewer consequences, in the attempt to control action, an attempt that is never fulfilled.

As Clausewitz argues, occupation always comes with two impossibilities.<sup>9</sup> The first is simply numerical. If policing ever became total, if the constructs of the state ever came to frame and determine existence, policing would be irrelevant, and all of existence would be nothing but a drab, defined, playing out of a teleological script. But, since this is not the case, since theft still occurs, resistance still happens, people still get into confrontations with the police, refuse to snitch, and so on, it is simple to see that this totality does not exist. Therefore, we have to think of police, and the logistics of policing, as a limited and defined deployment of bodies and actions into space, and one that only covers a limited amount of space with a limited number of bodies. For example, take the G20 in Pittsburgh, which saw assembled the largest single police force in American history. If we line all of these cops up to the point where they could control all action in space in a direct way, without weapons, transportation or movement, they control a very limited amount of space in a city the size of Pittsburgh; add to this variances in terrain, which limit movement, the movements of the city and the density of actions that occur, and the security priorities that keep certain numbers of police pinned to a location, and that space shrinks further. In a more extreme example—US military tactical shifts after the War in Iraq—we see this even more clearly. When the US invaded Afghanistan and then Iraq, they did so under the fantasy that occupation was unnecessary, that somehow their very presence would construct some total capitulation. But, as was found quickly, a low concentration of troops in resistant terrains allows for the conditions for insurgencies to flourish, organize, and arm. As a result, they flooded these regions with troops, stretching their capacity to the breaking point, and not only still failed to cover the totality of the terrain, but also left open other terrain, Northern Africa and the Yemen specifically. Their concentration of troops prevented their projection through space. So they shifted into low-concentration deployments, backed up by drone strikes and Special Ops raids,

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9 Clausewitz, 1968

to attempt to cover as much space as possible, as consistently as possible, but this eliminated their ground presence and prevents them from holding any space. Literally, unless every square inch is covered, all the time, there is still the possibility of resistance action against or outside of the logistics of policing, making occupation not total. There are always gaps in coverage.

Secondly, action always changes the conditions and dynamics of action, a process that can never stop. Actions are within a time and space, a particular convergence of the dynamics of history, that both forms the conditions of that action, and also forms through action. Contrary to Aristotelean concepts of production and action as creation, we never act within or on some inert object, rather the object presents resistances that fundamentally change the dynamics of that action. Within the construction of history, all action generates resistances, shapes the generated effects of actions coming into conflict with the dynamics of other actions, in a process that fundamentally shapes the terrain of action. The state, on the other hand, exists as a definition of existence in a smooth, total, atemporal way. This means that it functions only to the degree that it functions totally in every moment, in all space, all the time, eliminating resistances and effects, and constructing actions in a smooth, resistanceless environment. The logistics of policing, the material manifestation of the attempt to construct the unity of the state in time and space, as time and space, only functions to the degree that it generates this total coverage prevented by numerical limitation. If this totality functioned, if all actions were defined, then we would be faced with a tragic, dystopian world: the world of immanence. For that to exist we would have to assume that every action was defined before being taken, the conceptual definition of that action would have to be the actual condition of possibility for all action. No actions could have any effects that were undefined, everything would arise as if disconnected to anything that occurred prior, if anything could occur at all. In other words, there would be no possibility of possibility, no ability to modify circumstance, only a total, metaphysically teleological definition of the totality of all existence, of which each and every existing thing is nothing but an expression. But, again, if this were the case then occupation, the logistics of policing, would be irrelevant.



Therefore, we have to assume that the police act, and that these actions generate effects. Even in their deployment, even if nothing else occurred, the dynamics of action are changing, the terrain of action is being modified, and this is happening in ways that can never be determined. Conflict still occurs, even just in the relationship of bi-pedal movement and hard ground, let alone in the collision and friction that action itself generates. In their very deployment, police generate friction, conflict, and open up other possibilities of action; history does not cease in its dynamics. We see this every time a counterinsurgency plan solicits an ambush, every time police crack down on a neighborhood and something occurs in another neighborhood, away from their concentration of force. Their movements change the terrain of action, and collide with the movements and actions of all other things that construct that terrain: the degradation of infrastructure, the growing hatred and resistance to the police, basic “crime” carried out by the desperate to survive within capitalism, worker absenteeism, strikes, and so on. Unless, magically, the deployment of the police actually overcomes the effects of their own actions, and somehow comes to freeze history in a defined moment, terrain will always shift, and this shift makes total occupation impossible.

The impossibility of the totality of occupation constructs policing as an attempt to project through ever greater volumes of space, in ever more constant ways. The entirety of the history of police methodology and operations centers around the development of the methods of projection. From the use of the car to the use of the radio, from the development of the surveillance matrix (ever more pervasive) to the construction of task forces, from the move into paramilitary operations to the development of so-called community policing—these shifts are undertaken in order to further project through space in more and more consistent ways. But there are limits to this projection, as we see with the transition from counterinsurgency to counter-terrorism methodologies within the US military, where a strategic choice has been made to avoid long occupations with large force footprints in favor of maximum projection across space with minimal numbers. With limited numbers choices must be made: allocation of force, structuring of logistics, maintenance of supply lines and so

on. This becomes more and more difficult the more resistant the terrain becomes. For example, within the team-policing structures in Pittsburgh, the police space themselves throughout a sector, with numerous sectors per zone and six zones within the city limits. Within a sector police within a team will space out as far as possible, patrolling streets alone, with one cop per car, and then converge on a site of response, for example a traffic stop. This methodology tries for the best of both worlds: spreading out through a limited amount of space while still being able to swarm a specific area. Capacity is sacrificed in this operational methodology. As force spreads throughout the city and is divided between sectors, whenever there is a point of response (for example in sector A) the entire team converges, leaving the rest of that sector open, unless force is pulled from sector B to the empty spots in sector A.

Projection exists in two forms: visual and material. Visual projection is the capacity to see space and things in space, to develop what in modern military parlance is termed topsight. In the 19th Century, police had tended to march through streets in formation, largely so that they could communicate with one another.<sup>10</sup> This is an often misunderstood aspect of Napoleonic warfare, and the phenomena of soldiers marching into lines of gunfire. These formations existed in the absence of forms of communication that could cross distance. With the noise of combat, the smoke generated by gunfire, and the lack of radios, all commands were transmitted either through hand signal or some form of audible command, and early police forces were no different. This column formation began to space itself out with the use of whistles or other noise-makers, but, even with this mild form of projection, the area that could be projected through was limited. Vision was also limited, and the ability to gather and transfer information. With the advent of the radio, then the car, and finally the helicopter and surveillance camera, policing was able to project through space at greater speed and communicate over wider distances, allowing for greater projection.<sup>11</sup> But, even with the total surveillance structure that cities like New York, Chicago and Cleveland are building, where private security cameras

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10 Williams, 2007

11 Delanda, 1991

are linked into the police camera matrix and private, semi-official police begin to act as support for city police, this coverage is remarkably limited. Cameras, mechanical vision, cannot in themselves analyze information—yet.<sup>†</sup> This means that, even with the most sophisticated tools of surveillance, and the most sophisticated, highly trained, human analysts, there is only a certain amount of information that can be processed— even though the amount of information generated multiplies exponentially with the addition of each new surveillance apparatus.

Even the most sophisticated surveillance agency, the National Security Agency, which pulls terabytes of information every hour, only has around 35,000 analysts to look into all this information: millions of phone calls, millions of emails, millions of websearches, library records, on the ground surveillance and so on. Analysis is the chokepoint, and this gets infinitely more complicated with the anonymity methods that are used by many of the internet generation. This gap between information and analysis becomes all the more stark when there is an attempt to analyze in realtime. At that point, to the degree that a command structure functions, information is being compiled, sent up the chain of command, analyzed, turned into orders, and communicated back to the ground. If actions are quick, even if this analysis becomes absurdly fast, there is still a gap, both temporal and interpretive, between action and the analysis of information about action within the command structure. Secondly, this is still limited to line of sight and information that can be combined with this vision. This is a primary difficulty when there is an attempt to crush any sort of insurgency; as David Galula<sup>12</sup> argues, insurgencies must become the terrain, meaning that they are incredibly difficult to differentiate from the “population” (of course assuming that these are not the same thing). Many experienced people know that it always helps to have a change of clothes at actions, especially if they make you look like a hipster. A quick

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† *Editor* — Though the underlying point is still largely true, Silicon Valley has come a long way toward giving sentience to surveillance devices in the six years since this text was published. Special shout-out to Amazon for their facial recognition technology, which they happily share with ICE (among other three-letter agencies). Face the camera and smile for Alexa!

12 Galula, 1964

change of clothes when dispersing means often the police will drive right past you—the simple change of clothes makes them blind. Anonymity isn't what exists when our faces are covered, anonymity, as Baudelaire argued, is the condition that we are relegated to in the capitalist metropolis. The distance that vision can encompass can be elongated with helicopters, drones, surveillance planes, cameras and satellites, but every time this distance multiplies the ability to pick out the micro-details of that space become more limited.

Material projection is the actual projection of force through space. Again, this occurs within a balance of concentration and projection. As policing began to spread out through space, and force concentration became more and more diffuse, the means of deploying a magnitude of force increased.

Initially, police may have carried nothing more than night-sticks and sometimes cuffs. Combined with movement on foot, force could only be projected on a line of bodily movement, and only at the speed of a quick run, along with the range of movement of the human arm. As force spread out, through the use of the car and the radio, and then the helicopter and the armored personnel carrier, this became combined with the handgun and automatic weapon to increase that projection dramatically. While the arm may only reach a couple feet from the body, the gun can project a bullet on a straight line for hundreds of meters, and with lethal force. This ability to project through the projectile was again furthered by the grenade, and grenade launcher, pepper spray and now the Taser, to project different levels of force out from the body onto a target, with the LRAD<sup>13</sup> able to project concentrated and targeted soundwaves over a quarter mile. These projections, along with increasing scales of force, are all ways of project force into space, to make the visibility achieved through topsight material and operative.

This reliance on the ground force is absolutely essential. Surveillance can act as a deterrent but not an actual material deployment of force as the US military found after the first phase of the invasion of Afghanistan. At

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13 Long Range Acoustic Device

the beginning of the war Special Operations and CIA were on the ground, acting as forward spotters. They would find a target, send coordinates to a drone overhead, which would send them to a base in Saudi Arabia, which would beam them to a satellite, and the satellite would send these to a B-52 that would drop a guided bomb on the area. This process would take 18 minutes.<sup>14</sup> However, for all the destruction that can be caused within this structure, the ability to hit targets evaporated when insurgents abandoned infrastructure and hid vehicles in mountain passes, making them impossible to spot. This made the US respond with the commitment of ground forces, which insurgents can track, which have supply lines, etc, that must be supplied, and so on, creating a plethora of targets. Even with huge numbers in an area, the US ability to control the space by physical presence and the projection of projectiles was incredibly limited. As is often witnessed within insurgencies, the movement of main force concentrations into an area meets little resistance, insurgents melting away only to reemerge after the main force moves on. Material projection is not just a spatial question regarding the amount of space covered, but also one of time, of the constancy of that ability to move through space.

As Clausewitz argues, this ability to move through space becomes increasingly difficult, and force projects less, the more uncertain and resistant the terrain becomes.<sup>15</sup> Even a single attack can force an entire occupying force to shift into increasingly dense, defensive, concentrations, limiting their ability to project through space. The more they concentrate force physically the less able they are to project themselves across space as a seemingly constant presence.

Projection of force, visually and materially, is the attempt to construct a terrain that is conducive to the movements and operations of policing. We have seen numerous aspects of this within the tactical terrains that we inhabit: the proliferation of surveillance cameras, the networking of private cameras into the police surveillance matrix, the proliferation of

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14 Kaplan, 2013

15 Clausewitz, 1968

private security and semi-official police departments, and the growth of neighborhood snitch networks, also known as Neighborhood Watch, but also the leveling of vacant buildings, the mowing of vacant lots, and so on. Most innovative in the methods of projection is not a technology, but merely the construction of metropolitan space itself. The street grid developed in the 19th Century and the freeway systems in the early and mid-20th Century made movement through space easier and more efficient. Projection does not just involve the ability to latently hold space, even outside of immediate presence,<sup>16</sup> but the ability to move through space. However, like any technological innovation, the development of the road structure, standardizing space within Cartesian models, may have made movement easier, but also disperses concentrations of force and largely confines police movements to the roads themselves. As in Paris where Reclus suggested turning into gun turrets the row buildings lining the newly-built wide boulevards (that now characterize that city), this confinement to the road generates zones of elongated vision and projectile movement,<sup>17</sup> but also limits the vision of what occurs off these roads, in zones of indiscernability, whether Iraq's open desert plains, Afghanistan's mountains, or the "unbuildable" spaces on the sides of wooded hills in the middle of Pittsburgh. These zones of indiscernability, of invisibility and possibility, become wider the more resistance is waged within a space, the less that people snitch each other out, the more open space off the roads there may be within a terrain, and the density of the dynamics and physical objects (whether trees in a forest or barricades on streets) within the lines of flight within that terrain.

One can easily trace this trajectory of containing land for policing beginning with land enclosure and the standardization of naming and sur-

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16 Many police tactics, including patrols, are meant to serve as a deterrent, to project their perceived presence outside of immediate presence. They may not be immediately present, but the altering of patrol patterns and the use of swarming tactics always make their presence possible.

17 US Army FM 3-19.15: The development of the road grid was meant to make movement more efficient, but also allowed for bullets to be projected longer distances without hitting buildings, allowed vision to project further down wide straight streets, and made streets more difficult to barricade.

veillance structures in the 16th and 17th centuries, of policing saturating space more and more thoroughly, as the dynamics of this space come to shape policing. The co-immanent dynamic between policing and space can be seen everywhere. In the suburbs we find the proliferation of private security, on every corporate campus, on every college campus, in every mall and shopping center, as well as the growth of increasingly fortified gated communities. In the core of the metropolis the street grid, the walls around the security buildings and precinct stations, the proliferation of private and public cameras, the deputization of pseudo-police forces at colleges and hospitals, the proliferation of non-police and “task forces” hired by development organizations, the rise of the community watch group, and the growth of the federal security apparatus have come to form spaces that are almost entirely framed around the movements and operations of police.

With the enclosure of space, and the elimination of the commons, the “public” has become something to protect against. Surveillance saturates the workplace and the park. Police roll down the street looking for someone that looks suspicious; the streets in the poorest neighborhoods are cordoned off and Baghdad-style armed checkpoints are set up on the streets of LA. Paramilitary tactics are adopted by SWAT teams that increasingly become aspects of everyday police operations and the flip-side of the velvet glove of “community policing.” Everywhere we look the metropolis has become structured around the separation of space, the separation of bodies, the dispersal of the street<sup>18</sup> and the fortification of the private.

This does not occur in a vacuum, or in the absence of the attempt to amplify projection across space and time. As space becomes increasingly

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18 “And he who becomes master of the city used to being free and does not destroy her can expect to be destroyed by her, because always she has as pretext in rebellion the name of liberty and her old customs, which never through either length of time or benefits are forgotten, and in spite of anything that can be done or foreseen, unless citizens are disunited or dispersed, they do not forget that name and those institutions...”; Machiavelli, *The Prince*, as quoted by Debord, *Society of the Spectacle*.

striated, increasingly operated upon, space itself begins to shift around a new series of imperatives. As static as many of us may feel built space is, the solidity of terrain is largely mythological. But just as space shifts in order to allow for the smooth operation of policing (or prevent it),<sup>19</sup> policing has been modified to operate in the post-WWII metropolis with the incorporation of ever faster forms of communication, ever more sophisticated forms of monitoring and surveillance, and ever heavier weapons and paramilitary tactics.

What we are witnessing is nothing short of a constant security operation, a constant attempt to eliminate these zones of indiscernability, structured not only to respond to actions but also to prevent actions from arising or becoming apparent. Every day this more defines the spaces that we exist within; it is nothing short of the expansion of the prison outside of the walls. As in the prison, a terrain conducive to police movements and operations necessarily involves an almost total vision, a complete ability to project across space, the ability to justify unlimited uses of force. But, along with this, we come into contact with the primary paradox of counterinsurgency (policing is necessarily a form of occupation, and thus a form of counterinsurgency).

As policing becomes more and more all-pervasive, as the police become more and more able to mobilize overwhelming concentrations of force, their very movements generate resistance, resentment, conflict. As they project through space they become visible, and the methods of tracking

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19 In *Hollowland* Weizman recounts the debate around the rebuilding of Jenin after the invasion and destruction of the camp by the Israeli Defense Forces. The UN wanted to use the rebuilding process as an opportunity to rationalize the camp, by building permanent structures, widening roads, and imposing a grid pattern to the streets. Palestinians rejected the plan, arguing that permanence would sacrifice their claim to return to their previous land while the rationalization of the streets would make it easier for the IDF to invade in the future and easier to monitor, defeating the intentional chaos of the original development, built to resist invasion by structuring the space around dense winding streets (difficult for armor to move through and troops to maintain visual contact in).



their movements and avoiding their detection are becoming more and more effective. Even with this growth of the prison, to encompass all space to varying degrees, illegality<sup>20</sup> still persists. Every day, acts of economic disruption, like theft and worker absenteeism, are rampant. The state only functions in the space in which policing functions, and to more or less of a degree. In these gaps in coverage, generated by the sheer limitation of police spatial occupation and the limits of the range of vision and weapons, the concentration of state logistics is low, and the possibility of action proliferates; this becomes even more pronounced within spaces where there is an ethic of noncooperation or outright resistance.

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20 “Illegality” is a term that is only defined within the framework of law and the ability of the police to arrest, but all illegality presents a gap in police coverage.

# POLICING AS SOCIAL WAR

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*Activity in War is movement in a resistant medium. Just as a man immersed in water is unable to perform with ease and regularity the most natural and simplest movement, that of walking, so in War, with extraordinary powers, one cannot keep even the line of mediocrity.*

—Clausewitz, *On War*

**THIS PROJECTION** through space is evident on each and every city street, from the flashing blue lights of the cameras on the light poles to the threat of the undercover. The movements of the gang task force mirror the movements of the SWAT team, which directly parallels the dynamics of “community policing” and the designation of some as “undesirable.” In some places this occupation is barely apparent, but in many it has very much taken on the aesthetics of an occupation. But, for as much as this occupation can increase the capacity of policing to contain crisis, and the ability to project through space, it can never be total. The impossibility of policing generates a mobilization of an armed apparatus, in which all moments are assumed to be the terrain of action, the tactical terrain. On this level, the aesthetic shape of the content being projected through policing is completely irrelevant. We can sit around and discuss politics in a conceptual sense, but this is meaningless. The political is a direct relationship of force and a dynamic of conflict, something that oc-

curs within the immediate tactical movements of moments, something that happens.<sup>21</sup> Policing occurs within a tactical paradox: the attempt to mobilize politics (to differentiate between friends and enemies), to end politics, or to generate peace.<sup>22</sup> The concept of peace implies the end of conflict, and thus the complete determination of actions, the end of friction, the end of the possibility of mobilizing action, the impossibility of the historical: total occupation.<sup>23</sup>

Policing always exists as this attempt to operate peace, but through the mobilization of conflict. It is not that we could wish for more peaceful police, peace is impossible unless all action ceases or everything becomes determined, and as an action the logistics of policing are, like all actions, an imposition of certain dynamics in space. As such, policing is an impossible attempt, the attempt to mobilize conflict to end conflict, the attempt to mobilize the effects of actions to prevent actions from generating any possibility or effects. The impossibilities of policing necessitate a fundamentally different framework to analyze the logistics and movements of policing. Rather than the discussion of some institution, or some singular linear history, policing must be analyzed on the plane through which it occurs, the tactical, the immediate, and the material. To function necessarily implies a mobilization of force throughout space, as thoroughly as possible; or warfare in every moment in the impossible attempt to operate some conceptual totality in particular moments. The war of the state is a paradoxical war (not in the sense of a war between states, but the constant warfare waged on us in every moment, a war that structures the space we live in, a total war, a perpetual war).

But, as much as we may be tempted to think this in a generalized, total, conceptual way, we are missing the underlying structure of warfare itself. A common fallacy in the analysis of tactics by radicals is the structuring of a dualistic concept of warfare focused on micro-tactics, fighting styles

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21 Schmitt, 1996

22 Foucault, 2003: *Society Must Be Defended*

23 Ranciere, 2004; "Whether the police are sweet and kind does not make them any less the opposite of politics" (31).

and so on; and the meta-structure of strategy, or generalized histories of battles. This way of thinking misses the dynamics of conflict.<sup>24</sup> As Clausewitz argues, the war is a series of engagements that led to some result; the engagement is constructed from a series of combats, or immediate relationships of conflict, each of which necessarily changes the dynamics of the terrain of conflict, shaping future dynamics of conflict. To think “the police” is neither to think the institution of the police, nor the immediate ways that they fight on a particular level. It is to understand the relationship between the conceptual methodologies of policing and the immediate actions that they take, as well as the terrain that these actions occur within, and the effects of these dynamics of conflict in the construction of a tactical terrain. We have to think of the concept of the police as a collection of particular people attempting to operate their own particular way of understanding, through the framework of some total conceptual content, and then taking particular actions that generate effects. We cannot approach the police as singular,<sup>25</sup> and their logistics as unified, but rather, must begin to understand the logistics of policing as the impossible attempt to not only construct the unity of time and space external to their operations, but also the attempt to construct their own coherence. There are numerous means through which this attempt occurs (specifically command and control as well as supply). But, as much as a force can be trained, as standardized practices and uniforms can be, the immediacy of action and the particularity of those who act in moments can never be eliminated. This impossibility of internal definition, internal coherence, generates crisis—the possibility that this logistics could cease to function at any moment—and forces the constant desperate attempt to construct its own coherence as the condition of its functioning.

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24 Clausewitz, 1968

25 Whenever liberals argue that the “police are people too” they are hitting on an important point, and then, as usual, completely misunderstand the implications. If the police are just expressions of a unit or definition then they are robotic and determined, but not responsible for the implications of action, while if they are people—particular existences in particular moments—they only exist as police to the degree that they attempt to mobilize force to operate their particular understanding of existence as a total limitation on the possibilities of existence, making them fascists.

Projection occurs in relation to crisis, but in a complicated way. On the one hand, the projection of police logistics is always already deployed in the attempt to contain possible increases in crisis. Areas that are seen as ungoverned, areas that are “hotbeds for crime”—the neighborhoods of the working class, the workplace, the government building—these spaces, whether a single target is being protected or the general flow and dynamic of the street itself, always become the focus of police initiatives. When crisis appears, or becomes possible in a space, police logistics must stretch in order to address that gap in projection, this gap in presence, visibility, and deterrence. But, as this occurs, and the police enter more and more resistant terrains—areas where they are regarded as occupiers, where they are met with a wall of silence, where people defend themselves against police incursion—the amount of force that must be mobilized to enter these terrains multiplies, along with the uncertainty of their movement through that terrain. As a terrain becomes more and more potentially resistant the uncertainty of movement amplifies,<sup>26</sup> requiring more and more force to be concentrated there, if only to move through the area. This can escalate to a scale that pushes the police off the street entirely, requiring outside forces to come in, usually in the form of the National Guard and the Army. As the density and speed of action increases, the conflict becomes increasingly difficult to contain; if the terrain multiplies, further amplifying crisis, then it can become impossible to contain. Even in the face of the minor crises of the street on a normal day, a single point of response, a single point of convergence, can severely limit the ability of police logistics to project through space; as the police from one sector respond to a point and concentrate force, others have to be drawn from other sectors, potentially creating a cascading effect that rupture police logistics entirely, as we saw for a period of time in Greece in December 2008.

There is this mythology, born out of linear military histories, written by military scholars, mixed with a certain American machismo, that generates the idea that all military conflict becomes linear and frontal. Believing this myth is suicidal. Such a mentality is mirrored in pacifist attempts to engage in tactical discussion. They claim that “fighting the military on

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26 Clausewitz, 1968

their level will never be successful,” of course assuming that linear symmetric conflict is the only form of fighting possible, and ignoring the military component of all revolutionary moments. To look beyond this absurd assumption of linear conflict means to engage on the level of crisis and its amplification. With the advent of the Napoleonic military<sup>27</sup> (characterized by mass numbers, intensive intelligence collecting, and fast movement) pursuit became a primary aspect of military conflict; many engagements were defined by pursuit of retreating defeated forces. As they retreated, troops would get lost, defect, desert, and walk home or become isolated from the main force. The opposing force broke down, not out of the magnitude of the attack, but out of the multiplication of terrain and the acceleration of action. As action accelerates, and as terrain widens, there are more points to respond too, stretching the ability of the opposing force to maintain organizational logistics and falling, increasingly, into disorganization. This is the key to understanding all guerrilla conflict, all insurgency; it is never a calculus based on magnitude of attacking single points, but a multiplication of terrain, acceleration of speed, and amplification of crisis. This process used to take hold more quickly, with only minor modifications to the dynamics of conflict throwing entire forces into disarray, but this was before the advent of the radio. But even this history is not full proof. We only need to look as far as Syria to see the gradual effects of long, protracted, organizational crisis: regime soldiers relied on roads to transport supplies, but these were attacked, and covered too much space to defend, so they relied on helicopters ’til the airbases began to be attacked. Now many are isolated, able to communicate through the radio and cellular networks, but unable to move and now out of supplies.

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27 Delanda, 1991; Napoleonic military structures were characterized by the breakdown of the aristocracy during the French Revolution and the advent of mass conscription. Before the French Revolution, European military tactics were based around largely mercenary armies led by aristocrats (expensive to train and small) and around highly regimented maneuver warfare, sieges, and negotiated battles, with neither side willing to risk their forces in frontal clash. With the rise of Napoleon the chain of command became meritocratic and the ranks of soldiers, compelled by nationalism and conscription, swelled, now numbering into the hundreds of thousands. This allowed battle fronts to stretch for miles, multiple fronts to be formed, grand maneuvers, and greater speed through charge and pursuit.

This is a central principle and the basis for the doctrine of parallel strike, a strategy used since the 1980s to strike multiple targets simultaneously (preventing the reinforcement of certain sites or the ability to cope with the rapid amplification of crisis). As troops have to spread out, as conflict occurs in intentional forms in more and more terrain, coverage becomes more and more difficult; troops have to either pull back to safe areas or risk complete disorganization, complete logistical rupture.

With the advent of the police cruiser, the radio, the helicopter, the surveillance matrix, and the standardization of space through the construction of private property, zoning laws, building codes, and the imposition of the grid pattern of streets, space has been saturated by the attempt to amplify the capacity to contain crisis. This is necessary for policing to function. Not only is the structuring of space made possible by the attempt to operate some sort of conceptual content as a definition of space, which is also latent in urban planning, rural regulations, and resource extraction, but this terrain becomes, to the degree possible, an expression of the conceptual content being developed, both shaping the operations of police logistics and the space itself. But even with the structure of metropolitan terrain being shaped by policing, this does not prevent the crisis in policing, or even to keep it from increasing. This crisis is generated from two sites: the movements and dynamics of history itself (infrastructural decay, financial crisis... everything else that occurs), and the crisis latent in the very operations of policing itself, born from the impossibility of the coherence of police. In the very movements of policing, in the expansion of the terrain of policing, in the maximization of projection, the terrain in which this crisis occurs expands as well. Policing cannot be considered separate from crisis, just as the tactical manifestation of crisis cannot make sense outside of the attempt to generate unities of time and space; the impossibility of the attempt to construct these unities of time and space (crisis) cannot exist without the attempt to construct unity (policing) to begin with. As action occurs, as police logistics are deployed into space, these deployments generate effects. These can be the predictable amplification of conflict that is often generated by armed occupation, but could also be the more mundane actions within everyday life; everything has the potential to cause effects which are catastrophic to the attempt

to define existence, and everything that occurs outside of deterministic immanence—which is everything—is necessarily a crisis for policing. This generates a crisis in the very disjunction, the infinite distance, which necessarily exists between conceptual totalities and the particularity of actions, and without this crisis resistance would be impossible. Yet, this also generates this more foundational crisis, the crisis of the impossibility of the police as a coherence. Therefore, policing exists not as an institution that can be argued against within the realm of the philosophical, but rather is a logistics of the deployment of force in the attempt to construct the impossible, an absolute and total definition of the relations between things, people, space, and movement.

We cannot approach this question of the police as a static thing. Rather, as a logistics, policing is constructed in space, as something that occurs, complete with its own dynamics, sites of coordination and command, communications, supply lines, and the organization of movement within space. It is a deployment of organized content that attempts to move through the totality of space, as a form of limitation and definition of the dynamics between things, and can, therefore, only be understood as warfare waged in the social.<sup>28</sup> But, as with any logistical apparatus, the very mobilization of it also generates crisis within it. The impossibility of covering all space and time necessarily means that force is deployed unevenly, that it has to move to cover space, and that this movement entails further crisis. As units deploy through space they are met with resistances, equipment breakdowns and glitches, a lack of coherence, and so on, forcing the operation to remain in constant motion, generating constant crisis. As we have been able to witness through the ability to track dynamics of conflict in real time, through the help of live blogging and social media, the impact of crisis can be widely known. Every time resistance is mounted in a space, every time a logistical hub is cut off, every time a supply line is cut or force is concentrated in space, effects cascade, actions speed up. This speed of action, combined with the multiplication of the terrain in which action occurs, disrupts logistics, amplifies crisis internal

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28 The social here is not referring to some impossible, singular “Society,” but rather to what occurs between things.



to the attempt to construct the coherence of these logistics, which can enable the crisis to become a point of rupture, a point in which this logistical attempt to construct the unity of time and space, as well as the coherence of logistics itself, ceases to function.

Crisis amplifies through the friction caused in action. As this logistics deploys force through space, and crisis is generated in this deployment, that crisis amplifies to the degree that friction is generated in that very movement through space. Barricades are an example, preventing police from moving through space—but not all examples are so geographically static. Friction is generated in the deployment itself, but is amplified through intentional action, through the intentional multiplication of the terrain and speed of action, the multiplication of contingency and the construction of resistant terrains, where the movement of police becomes increasingly uncertain. As the speed and terrain of action multiplies capacity is stretched, logistics are stretched, supply lines are stretched, and projection is disrupted. Insurrection is the term denoting this rupture of policing logistics, where the police are run off the streets and the possibilities of action multiply. But this is not some conceptual calculus, and there can be no concept of insurrection in itself. The mentality that has become popular lately—social war as something that we engage in and initiate, and insurrection as an ideal that can be theorized about—misses the point. When we discuss the dynamics of conflict, social war as something that is initiated has to be separated from any dynamics that were occurring before this magical point at which resistance coalesces. Rather, social war occurs, it is the deployment of policing in time and space, and insurrection is merely an amplification of this continual conflict. As with the logistics of policing, insurrection occurs, it is tactical, and is necessarily a dynamic relationship. Our choice is not a conceptual one—one endorses or doesn't the thesis of police—but rather the positionality one takes in relationship to the impossibility of policing, to social war itself. It is not a question of whether social war occurs, it is only a question of how we relate to its materiality, to policing itself.

To engage in a fight against police is necessarily to engage in a material tactical struggle against the logistics of policing. No correct theory,

proper motivation, or perfect analysis guarantees anything in material struggle. We must move beyond the idea that holds resistance to be transcendental, abstract, conceptual, and begin to embrace it for what it is, an intentional engagement in the immediacy of conflict, in the dynamics of conflict itself. At this point, the only determination we must make is how we conceptualize this war, who we choose to define as friends and enemies (although this is a secondary concern and only allows us to make sense of what is happening). The actual struggle is a material question, and therefore one that exists as separate from the conceptual question. It is not a question of why one chooses any particular form of engagement in social war, it is merely about conceptualizing the dynamics of social war itself, and whether this conceptualization effectively disrupts the dynamics of policing. Struggle or resistance is a material dynamic, something that occurs, and something that, at the end of the day, only matters to the degree that it is effective. The longer we persist in analyzing policing as institutional, inert, and as a conceptual object that can be argued against, the longer we will fail to consciously engage in a dynamic of conflict, an intentional amplification of crisis, and the longer that we will remain nothing but activists and fail to embrace the necessity of our role as insurgents.

## *Appendix*

# **TACTICAL TERRAIN ANALYSIS: A HOW-TO GUIDE**

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As we witnessed in the Fall/Winter of 2011, repression can seemingly destroy the possibility of resistance. All around the country people gathered in and occupied open spaces, and just as quickly they were run out by the police. This was not only due to inexperience and an almost total inability to confront repression (largely due to the obsessions with pacifism that plague American social movements) but also to a lack of pre-action research on the tactical terrain itself. As we saw in the antiwar movement, and as was replicated in many factions of Occupy, there was an obsession with politics, political theory, issues, the ethics of certain actions... so much theory. But for all the discussion of resistance, and for all the endless arguments about tactics, there was no discussion of effectiveness, actual tactical dynamics, or the terrain in which tactics play themselves out. There were endless discussions of transcendental conceptual frameworks but absolutely no discussion of the particular tactical dynamics that exist on the ground. To focus on tactical terrain is not only to focus on the necessarily tactical conflict that exists at the core of all resistance but also to discuss the physical terrain itself, the tactical operations of the police, the structure of the terrain itself, and the possibility for tactical openings and amplifications.

Engaging in this sort of tactical mapping means recognizing the paradox latent in the approach itself. Tactical terrain is a constantly shifting phenomenon; it is the time and space in which action occurs. Yet, a research- and mapping-based approach is necessarily static; it generates static information. In other words, there is a certain obsolescence in the information gathered the moment after the gathering ceases, or at least the moment that the main body of information and the primary framework of analysis is developed, because the situation itself always keeps moving. This is compensated for, in military and police operations, through a constant stream of real time information coming into central command. In our case there have been experiments with using Twitter

and live Google Maps in order to map and distribute information about police movements. Regardless of approach we must acknowledge two things. First, for as comprehensive as this information may be, and for as total as distribution may be, it is never enough and it is never transmitted fast enough to actually encompass the changing dynamics of a situation. Second, we still need a general framework of information in order to put this information into context; without advanced research on the space or the tactics of the police, disseminating information about police movements is worthless. Tactical terrain research, therefore, will never give a total view of the terrain; it is not something that can be taken as true or as a hard logistical framework for the planning of actions. Rather, we need to see these research studies both as fundamental to the process of preparation for action as well as a baseline from which we can make sense of changes on the ground.

## **WHAT IS TACTICAL TERRAIN?**

We need to think of tactical terrain as a convergence. Far from being confined to the physical terrain, the street is a place of coming together; a convergence of actions, effects, ways of making sense. It is a result of everything that has ever occurred, everything that has led to this point in time in this particular place. Now, it is impossible, obviously, to be able to grasp the totality of this convergence; all we can ever do is attempt to construct a way of making sense of this space that is more or less effective in grasping that which occurs. In other words, regardless of all the information that we can gather and process, regardless of how deeply entrenched we may be in a space, it is materially impossible to understand this totality of history. As such a tactical terrain is always something that we can never entirely grasp. Our ways of making sense of this space will always exist at a necessary disjunction from the particularity of this space at this moment. This does not mean that the attempt to make sense of space is irrelevant, it can be a really effective exercise; it only means that we will never come to understand tactical terrain in some direct and total way, in some absolutely true way.

With this said, we are talking here about how to potentially make sense of a particular space at a particular time, and ways to understand this

convergence. All too often, in this sort of analysis, we fall into one of two traps. On the one hand, the tendency is to understand this space only spatially, to read the terrain itself as a static space. This prevents us from understanding the potentiality of tactical movement in that space. On the other hand, there is a tendency to obscure the terrain itself entirely, focusing, instead, on a history of tactical successes and failures devoid of any discussion of the tactical particularity of these moments. To avoid these traps we need to always treat tactical terrain studies as a convergence of dynamics.

We need to recognize that all terrain is structural, expressed in the research of maps, elevations, concealments, features, placement of points, materials, and so on. In other words, terrain has a physical dimension. We see this discussion in most of the great works of tactical theory; in the *Art of War* this is expressed in the discussion of concealment, elevation, and tactical advantage. Conflict occurs in a place, and the characteristics of that terrain play an integral role in how conflicts play themselves out. We see the difference in terrain even in contemporary conflicts during large demonstrations. In St Paul we were faced with a relatively isolated downtown area, separated from the rest of the city by a freeway and the Mississippi River. This presented advantages (the ability to section off and further isolate this space from the rest of the city, particularly important in blockading delegates to the convention) and disadvantages (most of the mass arrests occurred either along the river, on isolated streets, or on bridges). Compare this to Pittsburgh during the G20 where the use of barricades combined with the irregular street patterns and dense urban structure of the East End gave us a huge advantage in preventing police movement.

Secondly, terrain is mobile. Understanding this involves getting a grip on the neighborhoods, the traffic patterns, how things shift, and the way that the structural elements of the city facilitate this movement. Again, as we mentioned, there is a tendency to treat tactical terrain as only physical; as atemporal, ahistorical, inert. We reduce terrain to only its physical elements at our own peril. If we think of a city street, full of brick row-houses, we may see a static terrain; but even if nothing occurs overtly, they degrade, the pavement degrades, the space shifts and lives. Making sense of

the particularity of any space at any time is also to understand the animation of this space, the flows of the space, the actions that occur, and why. This involves making sense of where convergences of action occur, when and why. Only at this point can we make sense of the effects that actions may have and the dynamics that these actions will occur in.

Thirdly, tactics is a terrain of conflict. Understanding this means researching the terrain as a combative space, the histories of resistance and repression, the relationships with the police, police tactics, and particular approaches in particular areas, features that can help to facilitate actions, and so on. In other words, to the degree that the state exists, we need to understand space as a conflict between the historical possibilities of action and the attempt to construct a condition of possibility for action through the operations of policing. It is not that tactical terrain occurs in some bubble, nor that it is an organic process; rather, we need to think through policing operations, but also think these operations within the historical possibility of that terrain. To put it another way, policing occurs somewhere and this somewhere has dynamics. The actions taken by police have effects, and these effects cause shifts in the tactical terrain which cause shifts in policing and so on. We cannot think of conflict and tactics as static phenomenon or the direct expression of theory. For years we have attempted to grasp police tactics in a bubble, treating them as a whole that exists in some singular way across time and space. But tactical terrain research shows that these dynamics change over time, what the operations of task forces look like, what levels of force are allocated when and where, what common approaches to certain situations may look like; this requires a consistency of research that we don't currently have. Research Methods Tactical terrain research occurs on two levels. First is the abstract and general level, when we look at space in the widest sense possible, primarily on the level of the map itself. However, this transcends simple map reading and assembly and is the process of assembling a framework through which we can understand the space that we are gathering information about. While each person or group should, and probably will, develop their own process for constructing this framework, I have found that the most effective ones include physical space, mapping roads and other arteries of circulation, and also mapping generalized social dynamics, the division between neighborhoods, concentrations of wealth,

social convergence points, and commercial districts. Then we move from this general level onto the more specific. Here we will be going down on the street to understand how people and commodities circulate within this space, how dynamics occur on the street; this also includes things like timed maps of police force concentration, traffic concentrations, dissipation points, and the dynamics around special events (among other things).

## WHAT ARE WE LOOKING FOR?

*Points of convergence:* spaces in which there is a concentration of a collision of dynamics. These tend to be points where movement concentrates, and often enters into a level of congestion that prevents or slows movement. Points of convergence are also often the major junctions in the function of the space itself. These include intersections, freeway junctions, exits, entrances, choke points, commercial districts, bridges, and other “points of interest” (stadiums, venues, hotels/resorts, college campuses, etc).

*Points of deployment and surveillance:* points where the police leave from, gather, or project across space (things like cameras, neighborhood watch groups, substations). Mapping spaces like this not only allows us to understand where force is more likely concentrated but also where it is most likely scattered, as well as the primary point of departure for police operations. These points include police stations, possible staging and holding areas, cameras, points of concentrated police operations, substations, campus police stations, courts, and prisons.

*Terrain variance and features:* many radical groups conceptualize space as a flat collection of points. If we take the time to read the history of conflict, or even basic tactics theory, the features of the space itself, in a three dimensional sense, are often the difference between successful actions and crushing failure. Just as we use the basic layout and social dynamics of a space to make sense of where effective actions may be possible and where we hold tactical advantage, we can also incorporate terrain variance into this framework. We look for things like elevation shifts, spaces of concealment, alleys and other cut-through paths, terrain depressions and other spaces of concealment, convergence and dispersal points, parks and wooded areas, impassable areas (water, ravines, etc), bridges...

To gather this information we either rely on resources that already exist or ones that we develop. Keep in mind, this research is much easier if you do it with your friends, your affinity group, people in your neighborhood (if they're down). The more eyes on the ground, the more people scouring the web and talking to others, the more information we will gather and the easier it will be to organize and analyze it all. This sort of analysis is not about just gathering specific information; we have come to recognize that there is no such thing as too much information, and no piece of information that we gather has ever been irrelevant. The only limitation that we have is time and capacity, the amount of time we have to gather info and the capacity we have to make sense of it all.

Internet research is a great place to start. In simple Google searches one can come across everything from maps of spaces, maps of camera placement, police field manuals, operational after-reports, police theory journals, and so on. All of these can be valuable. Just make sure that people doing research practice good security; we highly recommend using the Tails operating system and/or Tor Browser, and storing your data in a VeraCrypt partition on your hard drive.†

## VIRTUAL TOOLS

*Google Maps* allows us to see the street layouts, terrain variations, building elevations, and so on. A simple Google Maps search gives us a tool that was a pipedream for organizers and operators even five years ago; it allows us access to a satellite surveillance network. Increasingly, as the labeling of space becomes more comprehensive, we can already see the locations of numerous points of interest, saving a lot of time that would otherwise be spent doing address searches and then mapping all of these points individually. However, while this can be a useful tool (particularly when combined with smart phones) we always need to keep in mind that these maps are often slightly outdated (sometimes more than slightly). As static as much of human development may seem, this space is constructed to facilitate certain forms of movement and that it is in constant flux. For

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† *Editor* — This section has been edited to reflect changes in technology (and known security vulnerabilities) since 2013. Do some research before relying on *any* advice for tech security, including ours!



example, the maps of Tampa used in the lead-up to a research project that occurred before the 2012 RNC did not incorporate a lot of changes in development in downtown; there were buildings that had been torn down, buildings that had been built, roads that had been rerouted, and so on. We have been researching alternatives to Google Maps, and have found Wikimapia to be an adequate replacement. Wikimapia not only allows one to look at maps with similar layers (except for real time traffic mapping and street view), but also provides certain advantages. Wikimapia is an open-source project. This does not guarantee security, but the site was used extensively by radicals in Syria and Libya without having information turned over to the state, not something that we can say about Google. Secondly, Wikimapia allows users to outline shapes and objects on a map and label the entire object, which is useful for the making of maps combining defined objects, but also terrain features and things like avenues of movement.

*Google Street View* allows us a view of the street, landmarks and scale, in places we have never been. The value of this cannot be over-estimated. However, we need to keep a couple things in mind. Remember that these street shots can be obsolete the second after they are taken; space shifts constantly so this sort of visualization only goes so far. Also, these images are taken with a certain distortion simply due to the limitations of the cameras. In other words, scale will not be precise, nor will the location of mobile terrain features (dumpsters, newspaper boxes, planters, etc).

*Internet searches* give us access to absurd volumes of information, and like I said before, there is no such thing as too much information. However, to avoid an endless abyss of research, focus is helpful. When I am researching space I tend to focus on a relatively few sources, but ones that repeatedly give solid info. Look for news articles about past actions, particularly actions that may have anything in common with the tactics sets that may be used in future actions. If we are engaging in this sort of research on a daily and local level then this may mean researching articles about police initiatives, enforcement priorities, methodologies, practices like “stop and frisk” and so on. Along with this it helps to look at articles about general police operations; often the police will have a public relations department, and even a Twitter account, in order to openly talk

about changes as part of “community policing” (or counter-insurgency). Though many of the sources that you will find will give you really sanitized versions of these programs, it allows us to understand what they are doing where and when, and that gives us some focus when we move into on-the-ground research. We also look at police annual reports; all departments need to make these available, and many are on the internet. Annual reports usually talk about the locations of facilities, the number of personnel at each facility, force concentration by shift, arrest numbers by precinct or even neighborhood, task forces, SWAT teams, and so on. They include a wealth of basic information on force allocation and operations, some even go into detailed discussions of methodologies and theories applied in policing operations (Tampa Police do this extensively). From this data we begin to piece together a rough estimate of total force allocation at any one time; to do this take the number of police in a precinct (if this information is not available take the total number of personnel, subtract administrative and investigative personnel and divide that number by the number of precincts) and divide this by the number of shifts, which is usually three during normal operations and two during heightened security. Also try to find pre-action security briefs or articles about briefs. In the past decade the police have often taken to intimidating us through exaggerated discussions of the numbers they have or may be bringing in, their centcom capacity, the numbers they are planning to arrest and so on. Even when these numbers are exaggerated, they can give us a good look into their numbers and mentality; the fact that they talked about finding PVC pipe down alleys and their training to dismantle lockboxes before Pittsburgh’s G20 definitely gave us a really solid idea of what they were expecting, and thus what they were prepared for (which was very different than what they saw, and a lot of us know how that turned out). Other good sources of information are the writings of police think tanks or think tanks that theorize about police operations (like RAND Corporation), and they all have email lists that announce the release of new papers; the same goes for police theory journals. There are also police conferences in which command personnel gather and trade notes, often the notes of these talks can be found online (this helps even more if your local police commander tends to give talks at events like this).

The ambitious can take on mapping police operations on a regular basis, which provides much more comprehensive information, especially when combined with other forms of research. This level of research requires a copy of the daily police blotter, a way to pull the information off the blotter (and they are all structured differently, so one may need a tech-savvy friend to data scrape the blotters into a database), and then a mapping application (this can be done through Google Maps, but there are really useful specialized programs and web apps built to create real time live maps). Then track this information over a period of time (at least two months or more), looking into points of response, when and where arrests tend to be made. When combined with police scanner data the information will become even more illustrative. From these sorts of maps, along with information gathered from other sources, we can piece together a relatively comprehensive understanding of local police operations.

## ON THE GROUND RESEARCH

Nothing can substitute for on the ground intel gathering. This means going out on the street. It helps if there is more than one team on the streets (you cover more space more comprehensively with more eyes on the ground). These teams observe people's movements, talk to people, maybe do a little covert cop watching, and so on. Getting into the space allows us to get a feel for it and also allows us to gather bits of information that no amount of internet research or reading will ever get us.

On the ground research can be broken into three general categories.

*Metropolitan:* This is intelligence relating to the flows of the metropolis, the circulation of people and commodities, communications, and infrastructure that comprises tactical terrain. This primarily focuses on the shifts in the movements and patterns of the space; when rush hour occurs, where traffic concentrates, where people gather and when, where police allocate force and when, the economic divisions of space, the divisions between neighborhoods and so on.

*Point of Interest:* This could include things like entering and researching the floor plans of certain buildings, the transportation infrastructure of a specific event, and so on.

*Grassroots*: This is the gathering of narrative information from the people who populate the space. This may include us, if we live in this space. Primarily this involves going to social events or engaging in the dynamics of the space itself, talking to people and trying to get a read on any number of aspects of the space. This is a great way to gather information that is otherwise being withheld (for example the hotel arrangements of delegates to a specific event).

## CONCLUSION

This is only the basis of a research plan and a brief discussion of methods. While there is no such thing as too much information, the volume of information gathered relates to our ability to analyze it. This implies a few things. The more people involved, the more information can be gathered and analyzed. Secondly, organization is key; the more organized gathering and processing is the more efficiently you can work through it. Thirdly, there is never such a thing as having all the information about a space; space shifts through time, conditions and dynamics change on the ground. Research, therefore, can only provide a basis for a framework to make sense of our information. From the point of analysis there are many ways to spatialize this data. We prefer layering of maps, usually beginning with an online mapping program (Google Maps, Wikimapia) that has the general points of interest dotted on the map. We overlay that with maps of things like neighborhood dynamics, commercial districts, and traffic patterns to help break up the map into easily digestible portions that we can research in a reasonable amount of time. Everyday, as information comes in from researchers we map the data, converge at the end of the day, and restructure the plan for the next trip based on the data received. From here we compile the raw data, look at the maps, construct a framework for making sense of all the information collectively, then write a narrative report.

There is a difference between doing research on a space over a few days and existing in the space that one analyzes. The more time on the ground, the more eyes watching and gathering information, the more experience we have with the psychogeography of a space, the more deeply the information gathered will make sense. From here the possibilities are limitless.

The more we know about the space that we fight in, the more effective we can be, and effectiveness is what matters. Through Occupy something was forgotten, again: revolution is an immediate and material dynamic, something that happens in a time and space. It is a dynamic of material actions, tactics, and a calculation of effectiveness. It is only in undertaking disciplined studies of tactical terrain that we can come to begin to understand what effectiveness can actually mean.





We hope this text finds its way into the hands of people who've already determined *why* the police must be opposed, and are now asking the question: *how*?



text by tom nomad  
design by leveller communications